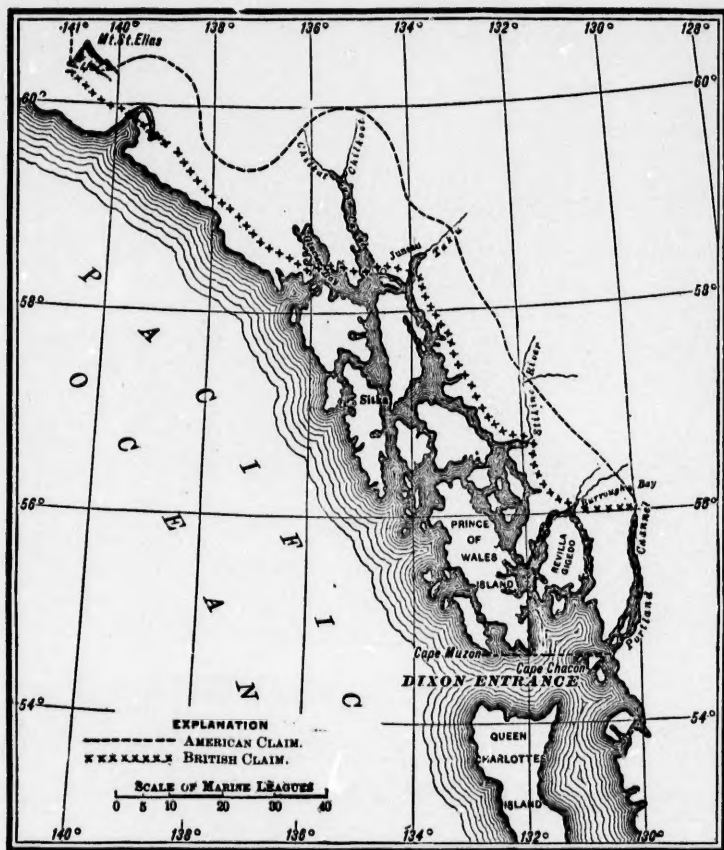


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THE ALASKA BOUNDARY LINE,
AN ADDRESS BEFORE THE AMERICAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY,

BY

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A few years ago I had the pleasure of addressing the Society upon the Boundary Line separating Southeast Alaska from the British Northwest Territory, calling attention to the ambiguous and uncertain definition of the line in the treaty between Russia and Great Britain, in which it was originally defined, and predicting a controversy, the beginnings of which were even then in evidence. Since then, as everybody knows, this controversy has grown in magnitude and intensity until it has attracted the attention of most intelligent people, and it is everywhere acknowledged to be of such importance as to justify a review of the situation at the present time. As a nation we have often been singularly negligent in the making of treaties involving delimitation of territory, and especially so in our intercourse with Great Britain, with which nation our territorial relations have been most intimate. Up to this time we have shown little, because we have felt little, of that spirit of "hold-fast," which has always characterized the diplomatic policy of the English people. We have been so busy in the occupation and development of the great interior that a few hundred square miles here and there of distant, unsettled regions have seemed to us of little importance. A better understanding on the part of the masses of our people of the interests involved would do much to secure a more vigorous support of just claims on the part of our government authorities; and it is hoped that a dissemination of better information as to the nature of the present dispute will result in a popular demand for a rigid insistence upon those claims. But it must not be assumed that the question of the Alaska Boundary is entirely one-sided. There are serious difficulties in the interpretation of the language of the treaty, and to some of these it will be well to give careful consideration.

It is well known that in the purchase of this territory in 1867 it was conveyed to us in the language of the treaty between Russia and Great Britain, made in 1825. Whatever jurisdiction and rights

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we may possibly claim now were those claimed and exercised by Russia from 1825 to 1867—no more and no less.

That part of the treaty which is responsible for the pending controversy is as follows:

"Commencing from the southernmost point of the Island called Prince of Wales Island, which point lies in the parallel of 54° 40' north latitude and between the 131st and 133d degrees of west longitude (meridian of Greenwich), the said line shall ascend to the north along the channel called Portland Channel as far as the point of the continent where it strikes the 56th degree of north latitude; from this last-mentioned point the line of demarcation shall follow the summit of the mountains situated parallel to the coast as far as the point of intersection of the 141st degree of west longitude (of the same meridian) and finally from the said point of intersection, the said meridian line of the 141st degree, in its prolongation as far as the frozen ocean."

The first apparent difficulty is the determination of what is meant by "the channel called Portland Channel." The Canadians, many of them, have interpreted this to mean that on leaving the southernmost point of Prince of Wales Island the line should be drawn at once to the north as far as the 56th parallel of north latitude, and this carries it to the west of the great Revilla Gigedo Island into Burrough's Bay,* thus throwing that island and a large block of the mainland under their jurisdiction, although now claimed by us. In order to enter what has always been known as Portland Channel it is necessary to proceed from the beginning at Prince of Wales Island straight to the east for about sixty miles, and then "ascend to the north along the channel," which is the line we claim. The omission of a reference to this easterly line in the treaty opens the door for the British contention, and to support it they maintain that the use of the name Portland Channel was an oversight. We contend, on the contrary, that the omission of the fifty or sixty miles of easting from the southernmost point of the Prince of Wales Island is of no special importance, because it would be assumed that before you can ascend along a channel you must get into it.

This point was strongly insisted upon for several years by Canadian authorities, but it has been practically given up as unreasonable and untenable, in the conferences of the Joint Commissioners appointed a year or two ago. A far more serious claim is based on the next phrase of the treaty, which declares that after leaving Portland Channel

"the line of demarcation shall follow the summit of the mountains situated parallel to the coast as far as the point of intersection of the 141st degree of west longitude," etc.

* Or Inlet.

The charts of this region on which the treaty-makers principally relied were those of Vancouver, who explored the northwest coast in the interests of the British Government about one hundred years ago. Vancouver traversed the estuaries and followed the windings of the coast pretty thoroughly, but he did not go inland, all of his work being done, in fact, from the deck of his ship. On his charts a beautifully continuous range of mountains is shown, skirting the coast about 35 miles back from the shore. This range was proposed by the Russian diplomats as a suitable natural boundary. The English, however, were suspicious of the accuracy of Vancouver's map, and were especially concerned lest the range of mountains shown thereon should be found to be really further from the coast than 10 marine leagues. They cited the fact that they had only a few years before encountered difficulty in settling a boundary controversy with the United States, on account of the discovery that mountain ranges shown upon the map did not so exist actually upon the ground. They proposed that the line should be fixed at ten marine leagues, about 35 miles, from the windings of the coast, and it was finally agreed to insert the modifying clause,

"that whenever the summit of the mountains which extend in a direction parallel to the coast from the 56th degree of north latitude to the point of intersection of the 141st degree of west longitude shall prove to be at a distance of more than ten marine leagues from the ocean, the limit between the British possessions and the line of coast which is to belong to Russia, as above mentioned, shall be formed by a line parallel to the winding of the coast, and which shall never exceed the distance of ten marine leagues therefrom."

It is a fact of the utmost importance that the English representatives were willing to accept a line "always at a distance of ten marine leagues from the shore," and that they protected themselves against a possible divergence of the supposed range of mountains to a greater distance inland. The extension of the line to the north along the 141st degree of longitude west of Greenwich is a simple astronomical problem over which there can be no dispute, and so the whole controversy is over the meaning of that part of the treaty which defines the boundary from the point where the Portland Channel meets the 56th parallel of north latitude to the 141st meridian, which it intersects very nearly at the summit of Mount St. Elias. The superiority of English diplomacy is shown in the wording of the treaty so that, while the swinging of the mountain range inland beyond the ten marine leagues shall not carry the boundary line with it, if it should be found to be really less than that distance from the shore, the Russian holdings must be reduced accordingly.

About ten years ago the United States began a survey for the purpose of definitely locating this boundary line. The first work was the establishment of astronomical stations on tributaries of the Yukon, to determine and mark at a few important points the 141st meridian north of Mount St. Elias. About 1891 a survey of the lower part of the region traversed by the boundary was undertaken by the United States and Canada jointly, but it was agreed that the two parties should work independently of each other, so that more ground might be covered, each Government to receive the results of the work of the other. A large part of the work was topographical, especially that of the Canadian parties.

The result of this survey was to prove, at least to the satisfaction of those representing the American side of the controversy, that the range of mountains shown on Vancouver's map does not exist, and that within the prescribed distance of ten marine leagues there is *no* range of mountains in Southeast Alaska "parallel to the windings of the coast." Mountains there are in plenty, but they are scattered about in absolute irregularity, generally increasing in height towards the east, but nowhere simulating a range, except in the northern extremity of the territory under consideration, where is to be found the Fairweather range, and possibly for a short distance in the neighborhood of the White and Chilkoot passes.

The American contention is, therefore, that in view of the failure of the first paragraph in its application to existing conditions, it becomes necessary to fall back upon the second and fix the boundary line at ten marine leagues from the shore, parallel to the windings of the coast.

To this argument Canadians have replied that the phrase "shall follow the summit of the mountains parallel to the coast" is applicable to those mountains which are admitted to be generally but irregularly distributed over the strip of territory in dispute, and that the line should be laid down by joining the summits of those nearest the shore. The effect of the adoption of this principle is to place the line everywhere very near the coast, leaving almost nothing but the western mountain slopes to the United States, and, what is more important, interrupting at several points the continuity of our coast line, giving to Great Britain many important estuaries, waterways and harbors. Indeed, it is clear in all of the negotiations that the primary object of Great Britain is to obtain coast line by which she may control admission to the interior.

Recognizing the difficulty of interpreting this treaty, Americans

have very properly called to their support the doctrine of *vested rights*, accruing from continuous and undisputed and *unmixed* occupancy. Here it cannot be denied that everything is in our favor. From 1825 to 1867 the Russians claimed this territory, as we now claim it, without a word of protest from Great Britain. Not only Russian maps, but *all* maps drawn, up to a very recent time, showed the boundary where we believe it should be. All English charts so represent it. The Hudson Bay Company, an English corporation, leased from Russia a large part of this strip of land, following and adopting the boundary line as now claimed by us, paying an annual rental for its use. Before Parliamentary Committees the territory thus leased was defined and acknowledged by these maps, and in numerous proceedings the Russian claim was admitted without question. Many important points were actually occupied by Russian colonies, and none by British.

After the United States assumed jurisdiction in 1867, the Department of State published a map showing the bounds of the newly acquired territory; many American enterprises were established within the now disputed area, some at the extremest points, all without a word from Great Britain; and there was never an attempt to colonize this region by British subjects. Only a little more than ten years ago, when the value of the mineral resources of the region began to be understood, the first Canadian map was printed showing any other line than that now claimed by us. Even now English maps, almost without exception, show the boundary line as it is found on our own maps, and as late as about a year ago the *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, an acknowledged authority on cartography, published a very complete map of the whole region, with the boundary laid down in agreement with American claims. As to the absolute justice of these claims there can be no doubt in the minds of competent but unbiassed authorities. During the session of the Joint Commission the British Commissioners submitted a proposal to arbitrate the whole question in conformity to the terms of the Venezuelan arbitration, but they declined to consent to the selection of an umpire from the American continent. The American Commissioners proposed to submit the matter to a tribunal consisting of three judges of the highest standing in each country, a binding decision to be reached by at least four of these. This proposition, which must impress all as being eminently fair, was rejected by the British Commissioners, and no further attempt to reach an agreement was made by the Joint Commission.

Through the ordinary diplomatic channels a tentative agreement

has been reached, covering a small portion of the line in the neighborhood of the passes at the head of Lynn Canal, where most conflict of jurisdiction has occurred, and a temporary relief from strained relations is promised. It will be but temporary, however, and it would have been safer and better if the United States had stood squarely for its contention in every detail. If once submitted to arbitration the result would be a compromise, regardless of our real rights, and these are so clear that no concession ought to be made.

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MAP NOTICES.

BY

HENRY GANNETT.

Atlas of the State of Pennsylvania, prepared under the direction of Joseph R. Bien, Julius Bien & Company, New York, 1900. Folio II., Plates XLVII., with Index.

As is stated in the title, this atlas has been compiled from the original surveys and various local surveys revised and corrected, the whole structure resting upon the triangulations and surveys of the U. S. Geological Survey, U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, U. S. Lake Survey, and the Second Geological Survey of Pennsylvania.

The atlas comprises a large folded map of the United States showing counties, reduced from the nine-sheet map of the U. S. Geological Survey, a large folded map of Pennsylvania, scale 1 inch to 8 miles, a geological map of the State, a relief map, and a map showing mean annual rainfall and temperature. This is followed by statistical diagrams. The body of the atlas is composed of county maps, on a scale of 1 inch to 3 miles, and maps of the largest cities and their environs.

The county maps represent the township, city and borough boundaries, streams and roads, but make no attempt at representing the relief, which, in fact, is too imperfectly known over most of the State to warrant any attempt at its representation.

This is, doubtless, as accurate and complete a representation of the State of Pennsylvania as can be made with our present knowledge of it, and will remain the primary source of geographic information until the completion of the survey of the State by the U. S. Geological Survey.

The engravings, printing, paper and binding are of the best.

THE REPORT OF THE NICARAGUA CANAL COMMISSION has just been issued in the form of a quarto volume of 500 pages, and a portfolio containing 7 maps and 6 profiles.

Map No. I is issued in the form of 4 sheets, sheet No. I being a general map of the Nicaragua Canal region, sheet No. II the geology of the same region, being the same as Map No. I, upon

which geological colors are superimposed; sheets Nos. III and IV represent the rainfall for 1890 and 1898 respectively over the same region.

Map No. II, issued in 3 sheets, shows the projected lines of the canal, upon a scale of 5,000 feet to 1 inch.

Map No. III is issued in 20 sheets, together with an index, and shows the projected lines of the canal on a scale of 1,500 feet to 1 inch, in great detail.

Map No. IV is Greytown Harbor.

Map No. V is the Harbor of Brito.

Map No. VI shows the hydrography of the Caribbean coast from Indio River to the mouth of the Colorado, and

Map No. VII shows Lake Nicaragua with soundings.

The profiles are those of the various proposed routes for the canal and for a railroad across the isthmus.

The work is an important contribution, not only to the immediate purposes of building the canal, but to general geographic information concerning the region.

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